Applicability of the Vancouver Model

An adjunct at Olympic College in Bremerton, Washington had taught a specific course for five years until the college wished to “try out” a new adjunct for that course. When the adjunct asked, “Don’t my five years of teaching have any value?” her dean responded, “If you were a full-time instructor they would, but as an adjunct, they don’t.”

Without regard to the motivation behind the dean’s actions, the fact is that adjuncts can be replaced and an adjunct’s teaching experience and seniority is often not valued.

But that is not the case at Vancouver Community College where the Vancouver Community College Faculty Association has bargained an egalitarian workplace provisions, where all instructors as valuable and as equal.

I’m going to discuss four features of the Vancouver Model, which include:

* **100% pro-rated pay for part-time faculty**
* **Job security through regularization**
* **A pathway for conversion** from temporary to permanent, regularized status
* **A meaningful seniority system** encompassing all faculty

While the “Vancouver Model” is based on the workplace provisions of Vancouver Community College, the term could be considered a misnomer because these egalitarian features are shared in some measure across other British Columbian institutions, including:

* Langara College in Vancouver
* Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Surrey
* Douglas College in New Westminster
* Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo
* Camosun College in Victoria

As such, the term “**British Columbian Model**” might be more accurate, or, as the former head steward of the Vancouver Community College Faculty Associate, Ingrid Kolsteren, once suggested, it could also be called the “**Union Model**” because it regards all instructors as being equal and fights for the same provisions for all instructors—which is what a true union should do, and not play favorites among those it represents. This egalitarian ethos is shared by the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of British Columbia (FPSE), whose bargaining policies are based on “*a collectivist, egalitarian, and equitable university workplace model as opposed to a competitive, stratified model of employment*.” (https://fpse.ca/sites/default/files/resource-pdfs/argpolsprinciples4universities201106\_AMENDED.pdf)

As a U.S. contingent faculty activist, when I first heard about the Vancouver Model, its workplace provisions were so counter to my understanding of reality that I found my mind actively trying to discount what I was hearing. It was so tempting to think things like, “What’s the catch?” or “It’s Canadian, so it doesn’t apply to us.” But the same forces that have caused contingency faculty employment to dominate in the U.S. also exist in Canada—and if anyone should question that, consider Terra Poirier’s *Non-Regular,* which is a collection of candid feelings by contingent faculty from Emily Carr University, which is within walking distance of VCC. The Vancouver Community College Faculty Association has honored its **Duty of Fair Representation** and defended the rights of all faculty they represent.

One thing that is basic to understanding the Vancouver Model is the fact that the primary difference is not whether a faculty member is full-time or part-time, as in is on U.S. campuses, but whether a faculty member is **regular,** which means permanent, or “**term** or **non-regular,”** which means roughly contingent. For us Americans, it’s very, very difficult to grasp that at VCC, part-time faculty can be regularized or that part-time faculty can be senior to full-time faculty.

**1. Compensation.**

At VCC, all instructors, whether full-time or part-time, whether permanent or temporary or term, are paid according to a single 11-step salary scale. There is no secondary pay scale discounted by 60 percent, as there is at Olympic College in Bremerton, Washington; at VCC, all faculty are paid according to the same standard. If an instructor teaches 66% a full-time load, he or she gets 66% of the pay.

At VCC, do part-time instructors have office hours and other out-of-classroom duties? Yes, part-time instructors are expected to fulfill the same instructional and non-instructional responsibilities as full-time faculty on a proportionally reduced scale. In works in this way: each of VCC’s 40+ teaching area develops a full-time instructor workplace profile that includes an allotment of time and duties. If a full-time instructor in a given teaching area is expected to hold 5 office hours per week, a part-time instructor employed at 60% is expected to hold 3 office hours per week. VCC has had this arrangement since 1992, so they’ve figured it out.

Perhaps the most trite word management might use to defend of the use of armies of part-time faculty is “flexibility” to adapt to fluctuating enrollments through “just-in-time” staffing, employing part-time instructors when needed but then not being obligated to hire them when not need. Well, true flexibility means be no qualitative difference in staffing, so that when there is a crisis, such as the need to migrate in-person to online, the institution is able to meet that challenge without frantic Herculean effort in hopes of mitigating that challenge.

**2. Job security through regularization**

When most instructors are first hired at VCC, these probationary instructors are called “terms.” But once they become regularized, they are no longer probationary. They may laid off, but for cause, and their layoff is likely to be grieved by the union.

Once regularized, most instructors in British Columbia “will work at a reasonable wage until retirement,” to quote Frank Cosco in a November 6, 2017 article entitled “Building Job Security into Community College Faculty Work – Experiences in British Columbia” (<http://www.lawcha.org/2017/11/06/building-job-security-community-college-faculty-work-experiences-british-columbia/>)

Regularized instructors are granted the **right of first refusal,** which means that they are offered the chance to take on addition classes in their teaching area before a new part-time instructor is hired. Most full-timers become full-time by ratcheting their workload up to full-time. At VCC, part-timers face no 66% workload cap, as they do in California. They are further granted the **right of accrual,** which means that the college strives to guarantee that part-time instructors are offered similar employment. Part-time instructors can be regularized before they become full-time, and part-time instructors can remain part-time if they wish without sacrificing pay or benefits. There is no penalty for it.

Regularization is not tenure, but it is solid job security and should be seen by the contingent faculty movement as a solution to the precarious employment that is contingent**.** I hope you will agree that regularization is a solution to the problem of contingency and the two-tiered system.

Both the AFT and NEA offer rhetoric about how part-time instructors should be hired using the same criteria as the hiring of full-time instructors. But the fact is: most colleges have an easy come/easy go approach to hiring part-time instructors that is far less rigorous than full-timers and gives rise to the elitism that is central to the two-tier faculty workplace. Why should colleges exercise care in hiring adjuncts if they are at liberty to dismiss or “try out” other adjuncts whenever they wish?

**3. A pathway for conversion from temporary to permanent, regularized status**

While regularization provisions vary per college in British Columbia, once a defined temporary, probationary period is satisfied, the contingent instructor becomes “regularized.” At VCC, this conversion is automatic: part-time instructors who teach at 50 percent of full-time for two years—technically, for 19 months out of any 24-month period without an unsatisfactory performance evaluation automatically becomes regularized).

For those in U.S. higher educators accustomed to two-tiered system and the precepts of tenurism—the belief that tenure is essentially a merit system and the tenured are deserving of superior treatment while the non-tenured are inferior and thus deserving of their substandard pay and working conditions—British Columbian regularization seems too good to be true. But regularization works like “normal” jobs in a civilized society—once new workers complete a probationary period, they are considered regular workers and can presume their job will continue.

**4. A meaningful seniority system encompassing all faculty**

From their first day of hire, all instructors at VCC accrue seniority in a common denomination (261 service days). Seniority standing is maintained by an entirely transparent system, updated annually, and available to all VCC instructors to view their standing relative to all VCC faculty or faculty within their teaching area (see http://vccfa.ca/seniority-lists-2017/). They don’t have to worry about someone else being offered a class before they, or in the case of layoffs. The order is laid out clearly.

Seniority the primary (though not the sole) determinant in workload assignments. (When necessary, it also determines the order of layoffs as was the case in 2014 when the conservatives controlled the Canadian national government in Ottawa reduced funding of immigrant ESL programs, resulting in laying off of roughly 200 VCC ESL instructors. The VCC/VCCFA seniority system provided an orderly fashion to conduct layoffs and restore the faculty as the rehiring process proceeded using reverse seniority. Without a credible seniority system, any hiring or layoff actions using the best of intentions are subject to second guessing of motives.)

Seniority accrual deserves mention: Term faculty accrue seniority on a pro-rated basis—a part-timer at 60 percent accrues 60 percent of 261 service days. Full-time regular faculty accrue the full 261 service days, and part-time regular faculty also accrue the full 261 days whether they teach full-time or not. This is to enable a regularized instructors to maintain their seniority ranking whether teaching full-time or not, so that they won’t lose their ranking only because someone else has taught more than they have. I believe this is a wonderful provision for those who have other careers or who have family and don’t wish to sacrifice their teaching professionalism.

Of these four workplace provisions—compensation, job security through regularization, pathway to regularization, and seniority—only compensation requires significant funding. The latter three require are either no cost or nominal one-time costs to institute. Setting up a seniority system, for example, may involve some effort, but no legislative appropriation, which is important because these days our governments are broke.

Yet in the case of contingent faculty, there is so much to be done that doesn’t require funding.

The Program for Change (is a roadmap at bringing about the Vancouver Model in U.S. institutions, that is, bringing about equality in place of our bifurcated two-tier faculty labor system. It includes these four goals and about 30 others, most of which likewise do not involve costs.

The Program for Change, drafted 10 years ago, projects these things happening over multiple bargaining cycles and legislative sessions. Setting up a seniority system, for example, can perhaps be done immediately, while equal pay may require some time, perhaps up to 20 years. If faculty unions and activists strategically work for specific goals of equality as a replacement of the two-tiered system as Vancouver has done, we stand a chance of one day getting it. It is the right thing to do. But we stand little chance of making meaningful improvement unless we have a goal.

As we say in the Program for Change, page 6, paragraph 6B (<http://vccfa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/ProgramForChange.pdf>)

The next generation of faculty should see real change and the generation after it should see this discriminatory period as a thing of the past. Whether we as individuals personally stand to benefit or not, it is long past time for a critical mass to commit to ending this situation and through collective action to do what is necessary to start progress down the road for change to restore normalcy and equity to the post-secondary workplace.